

## The Gift Not Like the Sin, Part 2

 Romans 5:15-17

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Turn to Romans 5:12-21. These are not easy verses for me to exegete. It's something I want to get through but the grammar is not easy and it's been slow going. I've also added several details that are not revealed here in order to fill in some of the gaps. Paul knew about these details but didn't see any need to add them in to fill in the rest of the Scriptural picture. We covered the theological watershed of 5:12 and noted that verse 13 begins the explanation of the last statement of verse 12, "and death spread to all men, because all sinned." Sin entered the world through the one man Adam and death spread to all men because all sinned in him as a race. This is not a personal conscious sin but it is a race-wide sin because when Adam sinned he was the entire race. As the human race particularized out of the one man Adam death spread to all men. Those that hold that God used evolution say the death that spread to all men is spiritual only because they have to normalize physical death which is a travesty because that makes God the author of death. Contextually the death that spread to all men is both spiritual and physical. Obviously verse 14 refers to physical death in that all those from Adam until Moses physically died. The way it works is that all men are conceived in sin and therefore spiritually dead and as a consequence of spiritual death there is physical death. The evidence is that even babies in the womb can physically die and we are not to think this is normal. Physical death is not normal. It's not good and it's not the way things were originally. Death is an abnormal introduction into the created order and we are held accountable for it because we participated in the one sin of Adam being in his loins.

Last time we pointed out that at the end of verse 14 Paul says "Adam is a type of Him who was to come," that is, to Christ. Adam is the type and Christ is the anti-type. The Greek "type" means a pattern. So Adam gives the pattern; Christ follows the pattern. For example, Adam stands at the head of the human race and all men are born in the race of Adam. So there is only one human race and that is how the Bible solves the problem of racism. There are no such things as different human races and therefore humans can't be ranked on a scale and some considered superior to others. We are all one race, the race of men, whether red, yellow, black or white, we are all precious in His sight and Christ died for the entire race of men. Christ stands at the head of a race within the human race and this is the race of men who are born again in Christ. At the end of history all men will be either in Adam or in Christ. So there is a pattern set. Both men were originally sinless; Adam by virtue of his direct

creation by God; Christ by virtue of His virgin conception by the Holy Spirit. Both committed one act that affected others; Adam's by eating the fruit of a tree; Christ's by dying on a tree. And both stand at the head of part of the human race. But it's at that point that the pattern ends.

Verses 15-17 are designed to show us three breaks in the pattern. Verse 15 tells us the pattern breaks so far as the basis upon which the one act affects others. So our death comes because of the one transgression of Adam in which we participated and is therefore based on merit; whereas the free gift comes because of God's grace and the gift by the grace of Jesus Christ in which we did not participate and is therefore based on lack of merit, pure grace. Paul says, "But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many." The word "if" is  $\epsilon\iota$  + the indicative which is a first class condition meaning "assuming it is true for the sake of argument and in this case it is true that "by the transgression of the one the many died," "the one" clearly being Adam, "the transgression" being the eating of the forbidden tree, the result being that "the many died." This "many" referring to each and every individual without exception. So if this is true, and Paul insists it is then "much more," an *a fortiori* argument, "from a much stronger reason," "did the grace of God" which refers to the gracious disposition of God, "and the gift" which refers to the righteousness bestowed in justification, "by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many." So there is a much greater grace and "the many" here are clearly those who receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. So much greater is this grace that it not only nullifies our condemnation in Adam that resulted in death but it takes it one step further by supplying the justification which results in life. So verse 15 is the first break in the typological pattern, a difference which is a difference in the basis upon which the act of each of the two men affected others. In short the difference is that we merit condemnation in Adam because of our sin in him, but we do not merit justification in Christ because He did that all alone and His righteousness is credited to our account through non-meritorious faith.

Now we might think about the attributes of God here because in this passage we see very strongly that condemnation reveals God's justice. So when a man dies having not believed then there is a revelation of the justice of God. He receives what he deserved; everlasting condemnation. But justification, on the other hand, reveals God's grace. So when a man believes and is justified it is a revelation of the grace of God. He freely receives what God graciously bestows upon him; eternal life. So we see both God's justice and God's grace and that's very significant because a lot of people who don't know very much about the Bible say that the Bible teaches two Gods; the God of the OT who is a God of justice and the God of the NT who is a God of grace. And yet, here in one verse the God of justice is the God of grace. There are not two gods in the Bible. There is one God who is both just and gracious. He's not one or the other, He's both and this passage shows that He is both.

Now how can He be both? The simple answer is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the dividing line. Jesus Christ is the reason there is no contradiction between God's justice and grace. Glance back at 3:21 and we'll see how Jesus Christ is the answer because God in the OT was exercising grace in order to overlook sins until the time came

when the Messiah would die for the sins to satisfy His justice. In 3:21 Paul said, "But now apart from the Law a righteousness of God has been manifested," He means a righteousness came into the world that was consistent with God's righteousness. And he's speaking of Christ. Christ is the righteousness. "being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets," meaning the prophets predicted the manifestation of Christ's righteousness. He is what all the OT prophets looked forward to. Verse 22, "even a righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;" in other words, made available to us is a righteousness that comes through faith, not by works, by faith apart from works. "for there is no distinction;" meaning there is no Jew/Gentile distinction in how this righteousness comes to us, it is by faith whether you are Jew or Gentile, no one was ever counted righteous by keeping the Law; the Law was never for that purpose, the Law was for sanctification of the nation Israel and revealed sin. Verse 23 explains how it revealed sinned, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Both Jew and Gentile fell short and that is what Romans 1-3 has shown chiefly, that God reached out to man by way of creation and man said, no; that God reached out to man by way of conscience and man said, no; that God reached out to the Jews by the Law and they said, no. No matter how God reached out to man, man did not reach out to God but instead said, no. So Rom 1-3 is a revelation of man's heart. It teaches that man is under the auspices of his sin nature and follows the dictates of his sin nature. Therefore, for us to come to God there must be some kind of drawing grace of God. Verse 24, "being justified as a gift by His grace," not by works, by grace, "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." There you see that the cross work of Christ satisfied God's justice so that His disposition is now one of grace toward us. That's how God can be both just and gracious, the cross work of Christ is the reason! Why the cross work? Verse 25, "This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Alright then, you see that Paul has already addressed God's justice and His grace and how the cross meets God's justice and allows for an extension of His grace so that God remains just and the justifier when we have faith. He no longer overlooks sin. He never compromises His justice. That's what Allah does. Allah and every other religious system always compromises justice. It's all just a comparison of your good works vs your bad works and whichever you have more of determines your eternal destiny. But where then is justice? How do the bad works get resolved? How does the so-called god Allah admit people into his presence when his justice is not satisfied? Well, there's a compromise. And it's that compromise that has plagued Islam for centuries. Allah is a compromiser. He's not just. Only the God of the Bible is just because only the God of the Bible has a program of actually exercising justice in condemning the sins of the whole world in His own Son on the cross and is thereby set free to extend grace. So verse 27, "Where then is boasting?" Well, that should be a no brainer. There is no room for boasting. The only thing we can boast in is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He is our boast.

Now if we were in 1 Cor 1 you'd see this directly in the text but I'm going to point it out anyway. Look at yourselves, there are not many rich whom God called, not many noble, not many educated, most of you are like

me, you are a common person and you know that you didn't lift yourself up before God and say, now look at all my greatness and aren't You just so impressed with me that You see some wonderful things in me. No. You are a sinner by nature and a personal sinner too and if He but glanced at you in all your filth His anger would dissolve you instantaneously; but He is smiling at you because you are in Christ by faith. He's not really smiling at you because you are so wonderful, He's smiling at you because you are in Christ and He's smiling at Christ, but you get a smidgeon of a smile too because that's where you are, you are in Him. And that ought to cause you to smile! That ought to cause you to get off your duff and run up and down the streets of Fredericksburg with a big smile on your face telling people the gospel! The Creator of the universe is smiling at you. What a thought!

Ok, what I'm trying to do is impress upon you how much greater His grace in Romans 5:15, that it would not only nullify the effect of the transgression which brought spiritual and physical death, but it would also supply eternal life and the resurrection as Paul will tell us soon enough. So whatever your problem is right now, no matter how large, it is far outweighed by the grace of God, if you have availed yourself of it. Have you done that? Have you believed in Christ? Have you put your confidence in Him as having satisfied the Father for your sin? He has whether you believe Him or not. It is there for you now; eternal life and the resurrection to come. You can have it today. All yours free of charge, just believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Now look at Romans 5:16 and here again Paul continues to say the gift is different, this is another way the typology breaks down. Paul says, **The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned.** Here we see another difference and the difference here is the number of transgressions. Note that there was **one sin** that resulted in condemnation but there were **many transgressions** that resulted in justification. That's a big difference. Paul says it this way, **For on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.** So it's quite clear the difference here; **the one transgression** and **the many transgressions**. And what did the **one transgression** result in? **Condemnation.** Before we go any further what exactly is condemnation? We've talked about it a lot but I don't think we've defined it clearly. **Condemnation** is from the Greek word *κατακριμα* and it means "a judicial pronouncement of guilty." It basically means you're doomed before God. Why? For the **one transgression** that we learned in prior weeks was committed in Adam. Not each of us as individuals in Adam but as a collective race. God looks at Adam as both an individual and mankind since we derive from Him. Therefore when he sinned we sinned as a collective whole. That sin is then actually imputed to us when we come into individual existence at our conception. And Paul is saying that we are judged as a result of the **one transgression** and the judgment is that we are condemned, in His court pronounced judicially as guilty. Not good. That is God's evaluation of us; guilty in a court of law, doomed to eternal punishment.

But the good news is that **the gift** of justification **is not like that.** What is justification? It's the opposite of condemnation. It's from the Greek word *δικαιωμα* and means "a judicial pronouncement of righteous." So it's not forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness only gets rid of sins. Justification goes further. It is a positive declaration of

righteousness. We're declared righteous in a court of law. You are looked upon as perfectly righteous! Imagine that!

The key difference here lies in the number of transgressions that resulted in the judgment of condemnation vs the number of transgressions that resulted in the gift of justification. There was but **one transgression** that resulted in condemnation but **many transgressions** that resulted in justification. This is explained by Murray who looks at it from the standpoint of time, "But the free gift unto justification is of such a character that it must take the many trespasses into its reckoning; it could not be the free gift of justification unless it blotted out the many trespasses." In other words, by the time Christ came there had been so many transgressions committed that the death of Christ had to handle them all. So we can see from this how much greater the grace is than the judgment. The grace resolves many transgressions whereas the judgment is on one transgression. Murray says, "...we can see how the magnitude of grace is exhibited by the manifold trespasses with which the grace reckons." Again, you can see that we are all condemned for just one sin, the sin we committed in Adam, which was actually imputed to us at conception, and because of that we are judicially pronounced guilty. We therefore are condemned not for the multitude of our personal sins but for our sin nature, who we are by nature. You're not just condemned for what you do—that's just the icing on the cake—the real issue is who you are by nature. So you have a sin nature and then out of your sin nature grows personal sin. All this has to be dealt with!

What's the sin nature? We defined the sin nature as "a predisposition or inclination to evil." We said we were conceived with it and born with the inclination and condemned because of it. But then out of it comes all variety of personal sin. Yet Christ paid for them all and for all who believe they are given the gift of justification. Thereby you see that the gift is so much greater than the judgment.

Now this line of argument that many transgressions gave rise to the greatness of the gift is then what is picked up later in 6:2 because Paul predicts that an opponent might take this line of argument and run with it saying, well then, we ought to sin more because the more we sin the greater God's grace. Have you ever heard that? Of course you heard that. And if you didn't hear that you saw that. You saw Christians arguing that they can sin, sin, sin and it's all covered by grace! So he refutes it saying, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" It's not good thinking. How, if we have died to the sin nature, shall we continue to live by the sin nature and produce all these sins? That's the point here. And if a Christian thinks that he can just go on sinning and sinning then he clearly doesn't understand that they are enslaving themselves to sin. They're not free. They're putting themselves in bondage to sin. It's not a good time. It's misery. So a look ahead there but coming back to 5:16 you see clearly that **the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned**. The gift arose necessarily as a result of not only one transgression but many and therefore it is much greater than the judgment that came by the one.

I would say then that verse 16 is teaching that we are each condemned for the one sin we committed in Adam; that sin comes to us by actual imputation at our conception; that sin is what is known as the sin nature and it is

the predisposition to sin that we are all born with. As we grow up to the age of personal responsibility the personal sins we commit come out of our sin nature. So because of both the sin nature and the many personal sins committed came the necessity of God's grace gift of Christ's justifying work on the cross. Christ died for both our sin nature and all our personal sins. To take it one step further and look ahead, when we believe in Christ the power of our sin nature is broken so we no longer have to live by the sin nature, but we can still give in to the sin nature and commit personal sin. When we do we need to confess in order to be restored to fellowship and living by the Spirit.

In Romans 5:17 we have a third difference between the gift and the transgression. The difference here is in what reigns; death through Adam or us in future life through Christ. **For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.** This verse is similar to verse 15 and again uses the **much more** form of argument. The **if** is a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition. We'd say, **if**, and it is true, that **by the transgression of the one**, meaning Adam, **death reigned through the one**. The **death** that **reigned** is here physical death. Death is king. Murray explains, "Adam sustained such a relationship to the human race that *through* him death exercised its universal sway over men." Death takes hold of everyone except the one generation living at the time of the pre-trib rapture. It doesn't matter how naughty or nice you are; you are going to die. The only issue is whether you will die in Adam and be subject to eternal condemnation or in Christ and be resurrected unto eternal life. As verse 17 goes on to say, **much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.**

So there is one part of humanity whom death reigns over and there is another part of humanity who will reign in life. Clearly then we have to reject universalism. Universalism is the doctrine that all men will be saved in the end and no men will be in hell. There are many churches now that are universalist. They're all liberal and believe in the social gospel and a lot of other extra-biblical nonsense. Frankly, people are not comfortable with the thought that people will end up in hell. I don't love that thought either but it's true and it's also true that Jesus taught more about hell than He did about heaven. But think of it this way; people end up in hell because that is what they want. They don't want Jesus Christ. Just look at the world today. Do people want Jesus Christ? They want Christmas but they don't want the Christ in Christmas. What they really want in all truthfulness is hell. They would rather die than believe in Jesus Christ and so hell is what God lets them have; not because that is what He wants for them but because that is what they want for themselves. And what of them? Death will reign over them for all eternity. There's no annihilation. Death will reign over them forever.

But **those who receive** Jesus Christ will **reign in life**. Observe the difference. In one it is death that reigns, in the other it is those who receive God's **grace** and **gift of righteousness** that **will reign**. One is impersonal death reigning over the individual, the other is the personal individuals reigning in life. As one author said, "*Death* reigned; it is not said that the subjects of death reigned in death. Death exercises its sway over them. But on the

other side it is not said expressly that life reigns. This would not necessarily be inappropriate. But the form used is that the subjects of life 'reign in life'; they are represented as exercising dominion in life. The reason why they reign in life is that they receive 'the abundance of grace and of the free gift of righteousness.'"

Another point to note is the difference between the **abundance of grace** and **the free gift of righteousness** that we receive. The **abundance of grace** is God's disposition toward the human race in light of the redemptive cross work of Christ. Because of the cross work of Christ God is free to look favorably toward the human race. The cross set Him free so He could look with favor on the world. But the **abundance of the free gift of righteousness** is the crediting of righteousness to the account of **those who** actually **receive** His abundant **grace**. Note the word **receive!** I want to point out that this word is an equivalent of faith. Remember what Jesus said in John 1:12? "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." That construction defines receiving Him as a synonym of believing in His name. So believing is receiving. Believing isn't doing something. Believing is receiving something, namely, a free gift, the free gift of righteousness. You don't do anything to receive righteousness. You just get it for free. How do you get it for free? You just receive it; accept it. You have to accept the gift. The gift is offered to you but you do have to accept it. If you reject the gift you don't get it. So yes there is a personal reception of the gift that is necessary. But it is a standing offer of a free gift. And what exactly is the free gift? **Righteousness**, a **righteousness** that is consistent with the very righteousness of God. It is not the attribute of God's righteousness. We never become God. Christianity isn't about becoming gods and goddesses. The finite can never become the infinite. But it is about being with Him and having our deepest longing met; the desire to be with our Creator. That is the only thing that will ultimately satisfy a human. That is what we were made for. We were made to be with Him. But we are estranged from Him until we receive this gift; the gift of **righteousness**; which is justification, the verdict in God's court of law in heaven that we are **righteous**.

But that is not all. Because we are legally righteous we **will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ**. What do you mean we will reign? I mean we will be kings! This is God's plan for believers, to be kings, and to rule as kings through the mediatorship of the One man, Jesus Christ, who is King of kings. When is His reign and our reign **through** Him coming? How is the future tense to be taken? It says **we will**. Is this a *chronological* future, referring to the future millennial reign of Christ and our rule with Him or is it a *logical* future, referring to tense two of our salvation or both? Constable holds to both saying, "The consequence of Christ's obedience was mankind reigning over death (v. 17). This implies the believer's resurrection and participation in Jesus Christ's reign as well as our reigning in this life."<sup>1</sup> I'm not sure I buy into both. If it is the logical future and refers to ruling in this life during tense two of our salvation, which is sanctification, then logically from the standpoint of the certainty of the statement that death reigned over us all through the one man Adam, then even much more shall all believers reign in their spiritual life over their sin nature. And that I have difficulties with.

What I am troubled by here is an approach to this verse which is known as the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and by that I don't mean eternal security. I'm all for eternal security but perseverance of the saints is not historically eternal security. If you are familiar with the five points of Calvinism then the fifth point in the acronym TULIP is Perseverance of the Saints. Perseverance of the saints is the idea that *all believers who were Totally Depraved God Unconditionally Elected and sent His Son to die a Limited Atonement for them that would by Irresistibly Grace be applied to them such that they would Persevere unto the end of their Christian life in good works.* Sometimes this doctrine is stated in the sense that the Lord will persevere in His saints in order to put the *onus* on Him as the one who gets the credit for the good works. But in either case, as long as one has good works until the end he proves that he is elect and has assurance of his salvation. But if he does not have good works until the end he proves that he was never elect to begin with.

Now this doctrine I have problems with because it does not seem supported in this or any other context. The only two passages that use the expression "perseverance of the saints" actually refer to Jews in the Tribulation time who endure whatever they are destined to face in the unique Tribulation time (Rev 13:10) or believers during the Tribulation time who reject the mark of the beast (cf Rev 14:12). What's interesting is the expression is used uniquely during that period of time and that is because it is a very unique time and must be treated uniquely. So while we might long to see all believers excel and persevere in good works until the end of their lives, the scriptural record indicates otherwise. Solomon, for example, started well but did not end well. At the beginning God granted him more wisdom than anyone in the human race, a wisdom he employed with excellence in his rule as king. By the end of his life he had married hundreds of pagan women, constructed temples for their gods and goddesses and worshipped them excessively. Solomon did not persevere and yet few would argue that this king will not be in heaven. Lot, as another example, at least from the scriptural record, gives no indication by his works that he was a genuine believer. Yet in 1 Pet 2:7-8 he is said to be a believer. Paul in Romans 7 will recount his defeats in the Christian life. These examples show that being a Christian does not mean one will automatically live the Christian life! That is something that must be learned. So then I see it as very unlikely contextually and Scripturally for this to be a logical future, referring to the idea that those who are genuine believers will reign in tense two of their sanctification. That would guarantee their perseverance. But I think it is much more likely a chronological future that refers to the future millennial reign of Christ and our rule with Him in our resurrection life. There are three reasons. The first reason is contextual. Note the use of the future tense in verse 9 as also chronological. Paul said there "having been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." Since the wrath refers to the future Tribulation period then salvation from the wrath refers to the rapture away from the earth before that terrible time. In verse 10 note another future tense that is chronological. Paul said, "having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Here, by parallel with verse 9, we are being told by what we shall be saved at the rapture, namely, by His life. That is, His resurrection life. We share in this life and therefore unless Jesus Christ is going to come back down to earth and endure the Tribulation judgments in His resurrection body then we will not have to endure the Tribulation judgments.



Where He is we will be also. So contextually I take 5:17 as a chronological future as well. We **will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Life** is here used as our resurrection life which is the fullness of our “eternal life.” We already have eternal life if we have believed but the fullest enjoyment of our eternal life is only in the resurrection. So in the future we will reign in our resurrection life **through the One, Jesus Christ**. That reign is in the millennial kingdom. At that time **Jesus Christ** will be the Davidic King ruling from Jerusalem and we will be spread across the earth reigning as administrators in His kingdom for a thousand years. Therefore we reign by virtue of being justified. It takes nothing more to be qualified to reign through Christ in the millennial kingdom than to be justified. So then what I am saying is that ruling itself does not seem to be a reward; the reward passages which speak of ruling seem to be referring to various degrees of rule that can be won as rewards. But here it is the simple truth that all who are justified will reign.

So then Paul has covered a lot of territory in 5:15-17. Adam is a type of Christ but the pattern is broken in three respects. First, in verse 15, the basis; the basis of death in Adam is merited because we participated in the sin; but the basis of the gift in Christ is unmerited because we did not participate in dying for the sins of the world; second, in verse 16, the number of transgressions involved; one transgression resulted in condemnation, many transgressions resulted in justification; third, in verse 17, what ultimately reigns; death reigns over unbelievers through Adam; but believers will reign in life through Christ in the millennial kingdom to come. What a Savior. He saves us to the utmost and grants us eternal reigning.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 5:15.